

# PEPPERS' FOLLY

Raising Cain #2

By

GUY VENTURE

## COPYRIGHT

### PEPPERS' FOLLY

By Guy Venture

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## **DEDICATION**

To former classmate Mike Goodson, who died suddenly in May. His passing reminds me of the important roles friends play in our lives. Like spring's blossoms, they come and go. The brightest and most colorful, however, are never forgotten. Rest in peace, Mike.

## PROLOGUE

The Northwest Ordinance of the eighteenth century was a glorious experiment of a Continental Congress that had yet to ratify the U.S. Constitution. It set forth a standard for which unsettled territories west of the Appalachian Mountains would be colonized.

The young nation that would become the standard for democracy worldwide suddenly doubled in size after the American Revolution. With the original thirteen colonies overflowing with citizens, the spirit of independence sparked the flame of adventurism. The untamed lands to the west promised prosperity and the idea of migration flourished in thousands of hearts.

A handful of Boston entrepreneurs formed the Ohio Company in 1787 and sought to purchase five million acres in what was known as the Northwest Territory. Selling land instead of giving it away to whoever staked a claim was an appealing idea for a new nation that was swimming in war debt.

The Ohio Company paid \$3.4 million for land north of the Ohio River. Ownership stretched from the modern cities of Marietta, Ohio to Huntington, West Virginia. It was a small piece of a massive wilderness that was known as the Northwest Territory. The Ohio Company planned to sell acre after acre to settlers who were willing to help build a New England community in the frontier. The sale was accompanied by the Northwest Ordinance, which guaranteed basic freedom to all who chose to start anew in the “howling west.” The mandates included freedom of religion, a commitment to government-sponsored education, the exclusion of slavery, and the promise native people would not be expelled from the lands they had called home for generations.

The model became a wholesome blueprint for the settlement of much of the lands that now make up the American Midwest. In less than a decade, thousands followed the handful of adventures who carved the settlement of Marietta. And once the westward migration began, there was no stopping it.

To get to the promised land, some settlers walked and others rode for months through treacherous mountain passes and raging rivers. Most traveled to the new settlement on the mighty Ohio River. They overcame privation and betrayal aboard flatboats and barges that carted everything they owned to the promised land. When they arrived, more hardship awaited.

They found virgin forests, abundant wildlife, unforgiving weather, and marauding Indians that rivaled nothing they experienced in any of the original colonies. It took determination,

hard work, and courage just to survive. Those who endured planted the seeds of greatness that have benefited the generations of Ohioans who have followed.

The “Raising Cain” series is a fictionalized rendition of early Ohioans’ struggles. Their stories are too rich to be forgotten.

## PREFACE

Young Billy Cain was excited when his family decided to leave their Massachusetts home and travel to the Northwest Territory in 1800. He had no idea he would lose his father on the voyage down the Ohio River and his mother to illness six months later. He became an orphan in a land that was challenging for those twice his twelve years.

He found security in friendship with a Delaware Indian teen and a massive blacksmith who worked for one of the richest men in the fledgling Ohio Country. It didn't take Billy long to find a home on the Maxwell Ranch and a future as a blacksmith apprentice.

It was on a legendary cattle drive to Zanesburg, he proved his ingenuity, savvy, and maturity. His friendship with *Quingus*, the Delaware teen who once saved his life, provided the opportunity to protect the cattle drive from attack and ensure its successful delivery. He became an instant hero at "Jeopardy Pass," but it was only the beginning of his adventures.

I hope you enjoy "Peppers' Folly."



*“The hard soil and four months of snow make the inhabitants of the northern temperate zone wiser and abler than his fellow who enjoys the fixed smile of the tropics.”*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON,  
American philosopher, poet**



## CHAPTER 1

### *Riding North*

When the snow started to fall on a cloudy November day, Clayton Maxwell was en route to the new barn his crew had built on the northernmost acreage of his massive holdings in the Northwest Territory. He was accompanied by his foreman, Dwight “Ike” Carpenter, and the young blacksmith apprentice, Billy Cain.

There had been much talk about the successful cattle drive and the role a young man in his hire had played in communicating with the mountain tribes and ensuring the safe delivery of the enterprise. The aging owner of the largest ranch in the Northwest Territory demanded Ike bring the boy along on their inspection tour so he could become better acquainted with him. Maxwell was the ultimate entrepreneur and had his fingers in many areas of interest. He relied on his supervisors — especially Carpenter — to keep him informed of all significant issues.

Max, as he was called by everyone, had never crossed paths with Billy Cain before and intended to get to know him on their northern trek, which would take a full day. He planned to find how one so young could singlehandedly engineer the passage of four dozen steers across the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains.

Billy, a mature thirteen-year-old, was forced to grow up quickly after being orphaned shortly after arriving in the Ohio Country’s first settlement, Marietta, in 1800. He got caught stealing a piglet from the Maxwell Ranch in the spring of 1801 and found a home while working off his debt.

A few months later, on a cattle drive to the community of Zanesburg, his ability to use sign language to communicate with the Wyandot Indians provided Maxwell’s herd with safe passage through the Alleghenies. His friendship with a Delaware teen saved the Maxwell outfit from ambush and certain death at Jeopardy Pass.

Max barely remembered agreeing to hire the boy as an apprentice to blacksmith John Terry, a friend who had been with him since Marietta was first settled. He considered there was no better time than during a relaxing ride north to become more familiar with the promising lad.

“Hell’s bells,” the outspoken landowner declared when a flurry of snowflakes began to fall. “I sure didn’t expect winter to arrive this soon. I was hoping we’d get up and back without freezing our backsides off.”

“I take it you don’t pay heed to the signs Mother Nature provides that predict such things, sir,” Billy piped up.

“Folklore is for the weak of mind, son. They have no scientific support and I pay little heed,” he said. “I did trust my father, though. He had a bad knee that acted up every time a cold front was headed for Boston Harbor. He believed that knee talked to him. Twice he delayed our ships from going to sea when his knee predicted hurricanes in the Atlantic. He was as right as rain, and it saved dozens of lives, not to mention valuable cargo.”

“He sounds like an interesting man, sir,” Billy said. “My Pa was an outdoorsman. We lived outside of Boston in a place called Shelburne Falls.”

“Know it well, son. What did your daddy do?” Max asked.

“He tried his best to be a farmer but couldn’t compete with the bigger operations. Then he did odd jobs wherever he could find them. When things got tough, we came west.”

“Ike told me you lost both of your parents, your father on the trip down the Ohio. That’s a shame, boy. But I reckon it is what brought you to us, and I’m grateful to have ya. Is John Terry treating you well?”

“Oh, yes sir. He’s the best teacher I’ve ever had. And thank you for hiring me as an apprentice. I promise you won’t be sorry.”

“It’s no thanks to me, son. Thank John and Ike. They saw something in ya, I probably would have ignored. If I had caught you stealing one of my pigs, I’d have hung from the rafters, gave ya a couple of lashes, and sent ya on your way,” Max said with a smile.

“Why would you do a thing like that?” Billy asked, unafraid of ruffling feathers. “You wouldn’t treat the horse you’re riding that way; why would you treat a human so? It’s humiliating.”

“Painful, too, boy. The Good Book says an ‘eye for an eye.’ If you steal from me, I’m gonna take a piece of your pride with my Cat-O-Nine. It worked aboard our ships, and it works on land, too.”

“Cut it out, Max,” Ike admonished. “There’s no need to put the fear in the boy, He’s proven himself in my book and, you know, you haven’t flogged a man since we got to Ohio.”

Max laughed so loud he had to pull his big stallion to a halt to keep from falling off. Then, he looked at Billy with a twinkle in his eyes and said, “There are times I’m a bit blustery, Billy. In time, you’ll learn to know when to listen closely and when not to.”

Ike snickered and said, “Speaking of blustery, it’s getting dad-blamed colder. We’d better get a move on it. Those dark clouds don’t look friendly.”

"Yep, we're going to get buried," Billy observed, looking around at the forest floor.

"What makes you say that?" Max asked.

"Look. The ground is covered with acorns from these oak trees. Most of them have lost their tops because the squirrels have been at 'em. They're packing 'em away for winter. I'd say they've been down for three or four weeks. It means winter is upon us."

"I never heard of such a thing," Max scoffed.

"Being you are a seafaring man, you must have paid close attention to the weather," Billy said.

"Sure did, son. 'Red skies at night, sailors' delight; red skies in the morning, sailors' warning.'" Max replied.

"I've heard that said," Billy replied. "But being raised by a farmer, I've learned a few things about the weather that are noteworthy, too. I'm here to tell ya, we're in for an ugly winter this year."

"How so?" asked Ike.

"Aw, you won't believe me if I told ya," Billy said.

"There is something about me you need to understand, son," Max said. "I'm stubborn as a mule and set in my ways. And I might laugh and carry on, but I'm always listening. The day a man stops listening, he stops learning. That little thing about the acorns makes a lot of sense. I reckon it's time you teach me what farmers know that I don't. So, spit it out."

"Yeah, I'd like to learn, too," Ike said.

Billy took off his floppy hat and scratched his head. He couldn't believe, grown men didn't know of the things he was about to tell them. His father had been spouting weather warnings to him ever since he could understand words.

"Well, August is an important month for farmers," Billy began. "It tells us a lot about what is going to happen in the months ahead."

"Give us an example," Max asked.

"All right. If an especially warm July is followed by a cold August, it means the winter will be cold but dry," Billy explained.

"As I recall, July was fairly pleasant here on the beautiful Muskingum River, wasn't it, Ike?" Max said, looking questioningly at his foreman.

“You’re right, boss,” the foreman replied. “As I recall the first week in August was a scorcher, though.”

“That’s right,” Billy said. “And it was followed by three weeks of foggy mornings. That means winter is going to be cold and wet. Wet means snow. And lots of it is on the way.”

“Hrumph!” Max said. “I’m not so sure someone wasn’t pulling your leg, Billy.”

“There’s more,” Billy said. “Do you know what a woolly worm is?”

“Sure do. It’s some sort of caterpillar. They usually show up on my porch in October. They drive the dogs crazy,” Max said and laughed again.

“Did you notice their color this year?” Billy asked.

Again, the boss roared with laughter and Ike joined him.

“Damn, boy. Ask my dog,” he said, unable to hold back his amusement. When he stopped laughing, he added, “Who pays attention to the color of worms, son?”

“Farmers do,” Billy said confidently, unphased by the enjoyment the men were getting from the weather tips his father had passed down to him. “A woolly worm has brown and black hairs. When the dark hairs around its middle cover a thin area, it means a mild winter is ahead. When the space is wide, winter is going to be a beast.”

“And what were they this year?” Ike asked.

“As wide as I’ve ever seen ’em, boss,” he replied without cracking a smile. “We’re going to be buried in snow this year.”

“You don’t say?” Ike said.

“Yep! And if you remember, I told you we should delay this ride north because it might snow,” Billy said.

“Yeah, but snow in November is not unusual. We need to inspect the new barn,” Max added.

“How’d you know we would run into snow today,” Ike asked.

“There’s an old saying my daddy passed down from his father. It says:

“Halo around sun or moon;  
Expect snow very soon.”

“There was a full moon last night, and it had a halo around it,” Billy added. “So, I expected the worst. It’s why I brought the heavy gear John gave me.”

"Do you know what causes that?" Ike asked.

"My father said, 'Old Man Winter was breathing heavily onto the glowing moon, chasing away another warm season.' I think it's Mother Nature telling us to be wary."

"Now, that's science," Max said. "I might laugh, but I think it's worth noting. I'm glad we brought the boy along, Ike. We're learning stuff."

He winked at his young charge and giggled his horse into a gallop.

Ike and Billy did the same because the snow was beginning to fall with more intensity.

By the time the trio neared the newly-constructed barn, they could barely see it from atop a small rise that looked down on a valley that was tucked between two elevations.

"We best get in there before it gets any worse," Max said. "Billy was right about them halos. This thing is coming down from Canada. It's gonna get nasty."

"I think you're right, Max," Ike said and kicked his mount forward.

Just as they worked their way to the bottom of the ridge, they scared a turkey from its hiding place. Its sudden squawk and flapping wings startled the horses and their riders. While Ike and Max tried to control their mounts, Billy pulled his flintlock pistol from his waistband — it always was loaded — and picked the bird nicely out of the air.

The sudden report of a firearm added to the chaos. Blackjack, the spirited stallion Max rode, reared up and took off like a thoroughbred in a claiming race. Ike chased after his boss aboard Stormy, his favorite riding companion. The landowner didn't get his prized stallion under control until he was at least one hundred yards away and on flat ground. Several inches of snow already had begun to accumulate.

With Ike in pursuit of Max and his runaway horse, Billy patted the neck of his mustang, Fury. He thanked him for staying calm. "That's a good boy," he said and dismounted to retrieve what would be the men's next meal.

By the time Max and Ike returned, he had the bird dressed and hanging from his saddle horn. He was climbing back up when Max said, "That was quite a display of quick shooting, son. Did you learn that on the farm, too?"

"I reckon," he said. "This was my Pa's pistol. He gave it to me on my twelfth birthday and taught me to shoot it when we were comin' west. I think it's the only thing I have of his. John fixed it up and it never seems to fail me now."

"He's a crack shot with a rifle, too," Ike added.

“Looks like we got more than an apprentice here,” Max said with a big smile. “Let’s get moving. Old Man Winer is getting angry, and I’m as hungry as a bear.”

By the time they got to the new barn, several inches of snow had accumulated on the ground.

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